

Bnei Yisrael bewailed Moshe... for thirty days; then the tearful mourning for Moshe ended. Yehoshua ben Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, because Moshe laid his hands on him. (34:8,9)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* had no equal. Thus, he left behind no one that had achieved his level of prophecy. Never would there be another *Rabbeinu* such as Moshe. The grief over his passing was palpable due to the irreparable loss. Even grief over Moshe, however, must come to an end. Yehoshua, Moshe's able and devoted *talmid*, disciple, became his successor as the nation's *Rebbe* and leader. The Torah was passed to him, as he carried on Moshe's legacy. Moshe laid his hands on him, giving him *semicha*, ordaining him to take over. With the laying of hands, a portion of Moshe's spirit was transferred to his successor.

The *Chasam Sofer*, *zl*, offers an alternative rendering of the *pesukim*, which accords us a valuable lesson for life – especially with regard to advancement in Torah. During the thirty designated days of mourning, *Klal Yisrael* grieved over the loss of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. He was much more than their leader and *Rebbe*. He was the father who nurtured them spiritually, who prepared and educated them to become a *mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*, "A kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." Under his tutelage, they achieved *Am Yisrael* status. After the thirty-day mourning period for Moshe, the weeping for Moshe ceased. Did they move on? The *Chasam Sofer* suggests that they did not. While they no longer wept for Moshe, they now had a new and personal reason to weep. They now cried over the stark reality that Yehoshua was their leader. Yehoshua was filled with profound wisdom, selected by Hashem and tutored by Moshe. One might ask: "What is wrong with that?" A leader's mortal life comes to an end and his successor, once chosen, assumes the vacated position and continues where the previous leader left off.

This might be true in most cases of succession. Yehoshua was different. After all, who was Yehoshua? Was he Moshe's son, grandson, son-in-law? No! He was his student – a student who had never left his *Rebbe's* side. Even when Moshe ascended *Har Sinai*, Yehoshua waited at the bottom of the mountain – for forty days and nights – just to be present the moment that Moshe descended. If, for some reason, he would have descended prematurely, Yehoshua would have been there waiting anxiously, respectfully, prepared to learn another *halachah*, an added lesson in leadership, in morals, in ethics. Yehoshua would clean up the *bais hamedrash* and set it up the next morning. He cared. He learned from Moshe; he served Moshe; he was the one to succeed Moshe.

Am Yisrael digested all of this as they came to the realization: he achieved leadership status because he was Moshe's student, "It could have been any of us!" There was no aristocracy involved, no nepotism; it was purely the best and most devoted student who became the next *Rebbe* of *Klal Yisrael*. Why did we not become leaders? For this, they all wept bitterly.

It is easy when the going gets rough to give a shrug and throw in the towel, give up and move on to something else. To achieve greatness, one must persevere, shun the option of giving up, and maintain a strong *she'ifah*, striving for excellence. One should never sell himself (or allow anyone, regardless of relationship, to sell him) short. Everyone has enormous potential. Achieving is up to him – not anyone else. It is well-known that *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, who became one of America's greatest Torah giants, would hang pictures of *gedolim*, Torah giants, in his dormitory room. One frame above his bed remained empty. A handwritten note inside it read, "Why not you?" This is why *Klal Yisrael* wept: "Why not us?"